



# A TRIAL OF FAITH;

OR,

Adventures in a Mission Station  
in Labrador.



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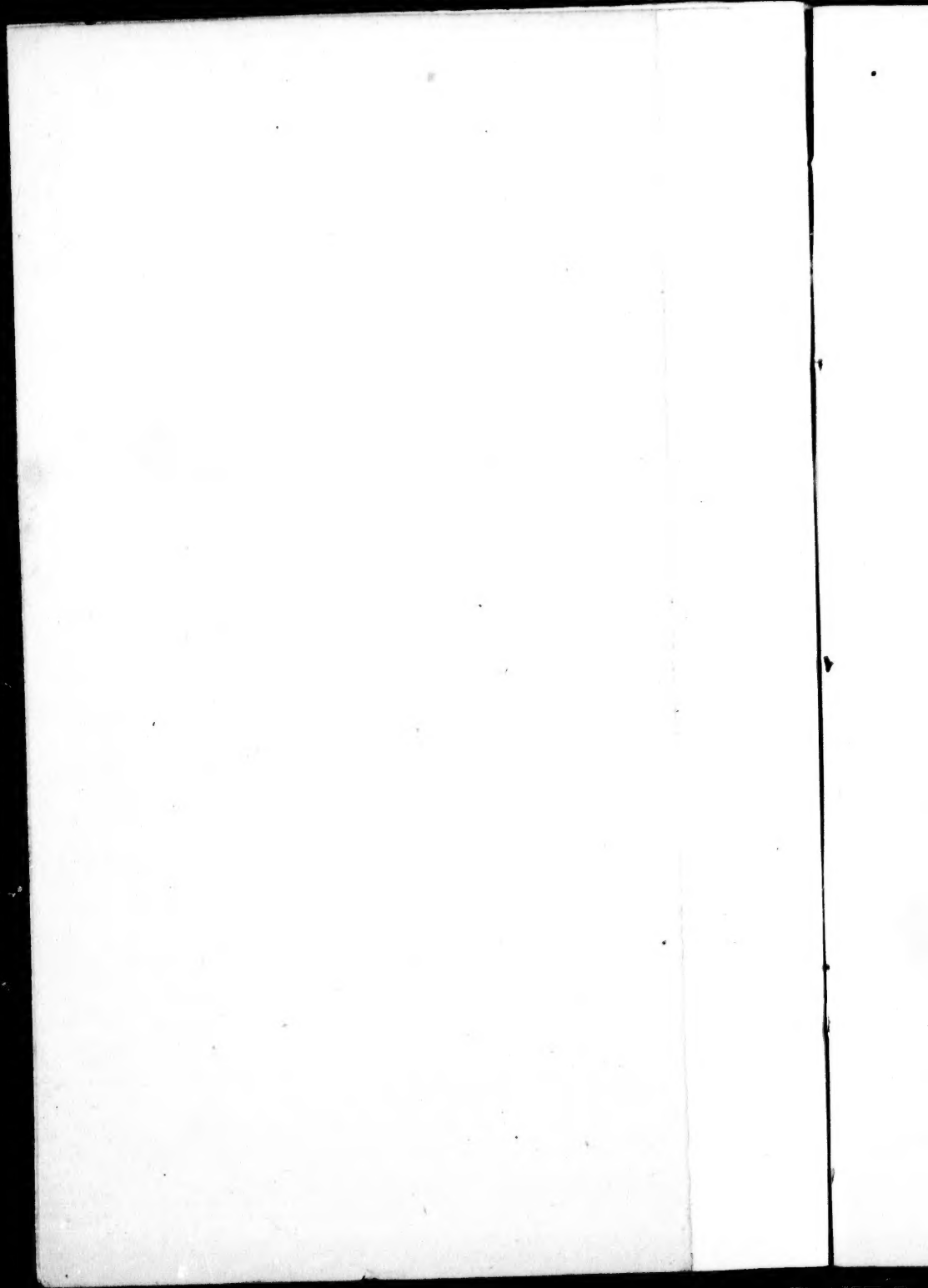
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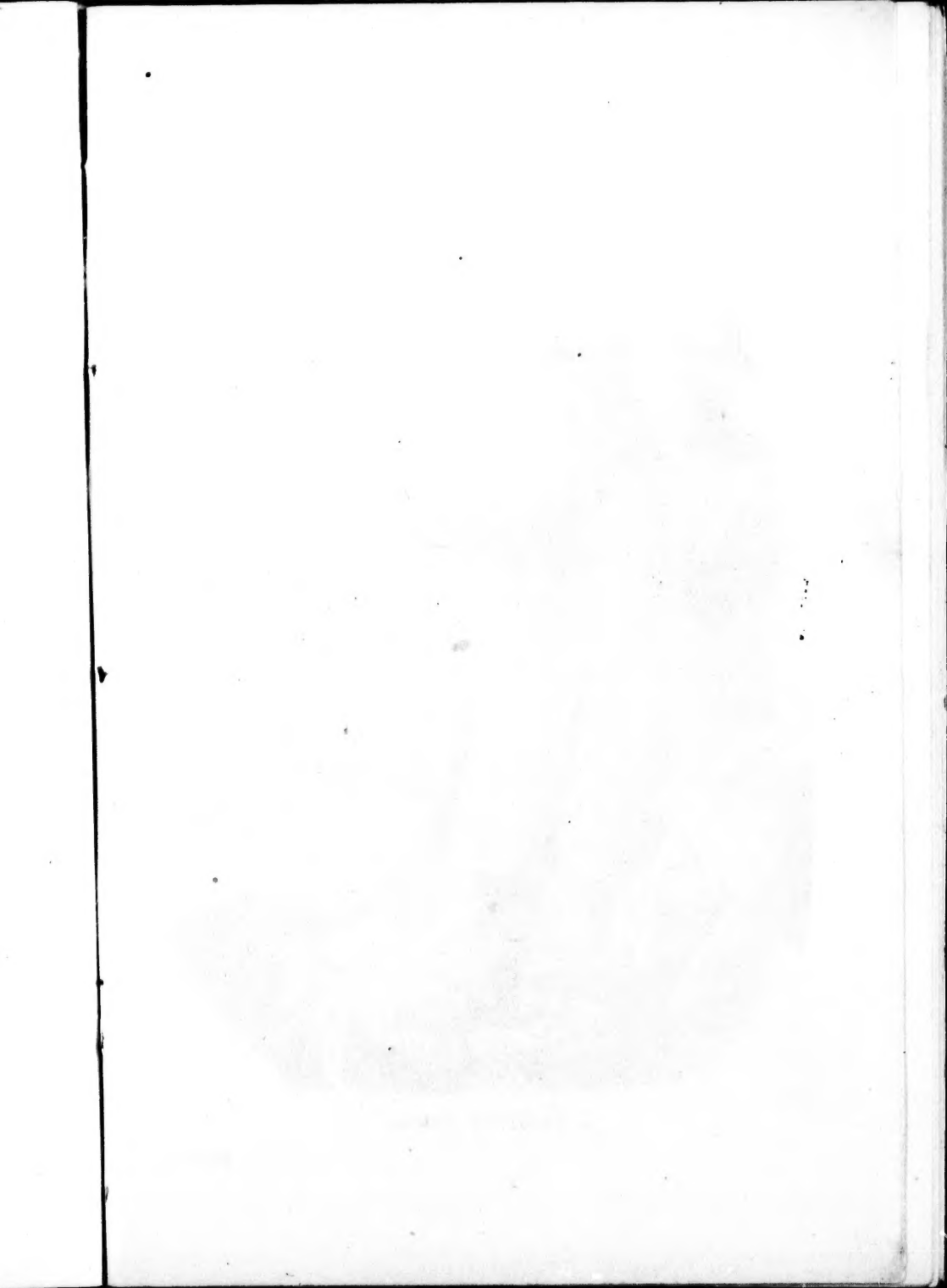
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NE terribly hot day in the autumn, about nine or ten years ago, two men might have been seen standing on a cliff overlooking the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and gazing anxiously seaward. The elder of the two, a venerable-looking, grey-haired man, seemed by his dress and general looks to be a fisherman: he was, indeed, one of the hardy race of fishermen whose lives, full of want and privation, are spent in the pursuit of seal or cod in the



northern waters. He was the oldest man in the settlement of which we are about to tell some of the adventures; he was much looked up to and respected by every member of the little community—and, indeed, deserved to be so, for he was a simple-minded, God-fearing man, who had been carried through many a trial by the thought, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good." He was the right-hand man of the missionary, Mr. W., who stood beside him; often, when the good clergyman's heart was inclined to sink at the apparently hopeless task of tending his flock, the rough fisherman's words of faith nerved him anew for his work.

It was indeed a disheartening life. True, his people were in many ways singularly simple and good; they are a very hospitable, generous race, and eager to seize all the

opportunities for learning how to serve God, but they are very ignorant, as, indeed, is to be expected, for we English have too often left our emigrants to forget the knowledge of God which they once had.

The Labrador fishermen and their families might preach us many a lesson of zeal and faith: the miles which they are willing to travel to attend a church service, their readiness to give up the best they have to God's messengers when they go among them, the eagerness with which they throng to listen to the word of God, and their readiness to subscribe, miserably poor as they are, to the support of their missionary, have been often written about by those set over them as overseers of Christ's flock.

But it was the bodily want and suffering which he saw around him which disheartened Mr. Wheeler; in that severe climate, shut

out as they are for about nine months of the year from all communication with the inhabited parts of the world, their privations are often very severe ; nor does this isolation press less heavily upon the missionary, who has often to suffer hardships undreamt of in our civilised land.

To these bodily privations are added severe mental privations : shut off from all communication with those of their own standing in life (for no settlers of the higher classes are to be found in these cold, desolate regions), without a possibility of hearing from relations and friends in England for at least eight, and probably nine months in the year, they must indeed have hearts firmly set upon Christ's service, or they could never go through the strain upon body and mind. In other churches they generally send two missionaries together, as our Lord sent the

seventy disciples by two and two, and it is much to be wished that some such practice could be introduced in our church when sending missionaries to such remote regions, so that they might strengthen each other.

A missionary who had charge of the Magdalen Islands about the time of which this tale tells, gave a touching account of his sufferings during the last winter but one of his stay there. He heard of the dangerous illness of his mother in England; before further tidings came, the channel of communication was closed by the grim gate of ice. Nine months he remained in suspense, not knowing whether he had a mother still on earth. Then came the letters, which, had it not been for the severe weather, ought to have reached him nine months before: his mother was gone. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick," says Solómon; it may there-

fore be imagined what a fainting heart this poor man had during the dreary winter.

These Magdalen Islands are now without a missionary. Alas! that it should be so; but no one can be found willing to undertake such an arduous post, and one so entirely wanting in worldly advantages. The health of one missionary after another has broken down, and although no one is kept there for more than three years, on account of the strain on the mind, no one can be found willing to be banished even for that time. So the good work there is at a standstill; a grievous thing for our British settlers, who have only a chance of religious privileges about once in two years, and then many of them have to travel great distances, and undergo perils by land and sea, in search of the Bread of Life. But this has nothing to do with the present tale.

Mr. Wheeler had not the trial of solitude, as he had a wife and children ; but it may be doubted whether it may not have been a greater trial to him to endure seeing them suffer hardships and want than bearing such trial alone. He was a middle-aged man, but having taken Holy Orders late in life he was still a deacon, a great additional privation to himself and his flock, as there was no priest within several hundred miles, and no chance of receiving the Holy Communion excepting at the time of the Bishop's visitation. Well might Mr. Wheeler look sadly out to sea, where the sun's rays caught the white sails of a small ship beating heavily westward, for in that small, ill-accommodated vessel were the Bishop of Quebec and his chaplain, returning from the visitation, which they can only make every two years.

“God grant they may reach home in time ; but everything seems against us, and they’re likely to make but a rough passage of it, with the wind so contrary.”

“Never you fear, your reverence, we shall be kept through even worse straits than this ; and anything that man can do for us the Bishop will do, you may be pretty sure.”

“Indeed he will, but it is late in the season, and the question is whether he will reach Quebec in time ; at any rate, I tell you what it is, we must not trust to that alone—under God, we must help ourselves. ‘A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,’ and ‘a penny saved is a penny gained.’ Do you think it would be possible to get the people to collect all the stores in the settlement, and put themselves upon rations till the supplies come from Quebec ? As it is there is plenty at present, but our women are

not so thrifty as they might be ; I fear a good deal of it might be wasted, and we might have cause to repent it when it was too late."

The fisherman shook his head. " I fear, sir, there'd be no good your trying now, though there's scarce anything the people would not do for you. I, for my part, don't see clearly what it is you want."

" Let us make a committee of the oldest men amongst us—I will head it if you like—and let us all try to persuade the people of the danger we are in if the supplies do not come. God help us if they do not, for I can see nothing before us but starvation."

The fisherman shook his grey head solemnly.

" That's true, your reverence ; everything has failed this year—the fish, the seals, even our little crops—and how ever we're to get on I don't know ; but," brightening up, " never you fear, for the Bishop promised to send us



help, and I think he's nigh as anxious for us as we are for ourselves, so all will go well in time."

Mr. W. sighed. It is too much the fault of the Labrador people not to take sufficient thought for the morrow, and he regretted that they knew the Bishop had promised assistance, as he foresaw how it would prevent their taking needful precautions, in case anything should happen to prevent the delivery of the stores, which he knew would be sent off as soon as possible. He stood in silence for some time, looking at the grim grey rocks which bound this rough coast—at the dark green pines, which are the principal trees to be seen—and then again at the ship in the distance, growing more and more indistinct every moment; at last he said, "Well, we can at any rate make one attempt: let us try to persuade every one, if the wind

remains in this quarter for three weeks, to put by their stores, for it will lessen our hopes, and winter will be upon us before we expect it."

So it was agreed ; and the two men left the cliff, and turned homewards with sad hearts. Before them lay the wooden village, which was the capital of the settlement ; its church and school-house had been, once upon a time, part of a vessel wrecked on the coast, and had been put up by the loving hands of the fishermen, all of whom had been eager to give labour if they could not give money ; and here the missionary held his services and taught the children, though he was not without hopes that when he went to Quebec for ordination in the coming year, as he expected to do, he might persuade some earnest man or woman to come back with him and share his labours, by teaching in the school.

In the meantime, the ship which the Bishop had engaged for his visitation struggled towards home. Anything more wretched than the accommodation it would be difficult to imagine. There was but one cabin in the vessel, which contained one berth and a bench, on which the Bishop and his chaplain took it by turns to sleep. All those sailors who were not on duty were in the cabin smoking and drinking when they were not sleeping, and the united smells of bilge-water, tobacco-smoke, spirits, and human beings, can be better imagined than described. The fare, too, was not sumptuous, for the Bishop had grudged to take anything from the poorly-provisioned people of Labrador, and an unusually long outward passage had exhausted the stores of the little ship. It was strange that the wind should have seemed as anxious to prevent their homeward passage as to

prevent the outward one. Bread and an onion was the chief meal during the journey to Quebec.

Immediately on arriving at Quebec, the Bishop took steps for the relief of his poor flock in Labrador, for whose safety he felt great anxiety. He had only two or three days to spend in Quebec, as he had then to make a visitation of the *Megantic*, where he had promised to hold several confirmations and ordinations, and to consecrate several churches.

He sent for a clergyman well known for his zealous and good work among the people of Newfoundland, and knowing how ready he would be to help, he begged him to collect as large a sum as he could from the merchants of Quebec, who are noted for their liberality.

In the meantime the Bishop called on

the French governor, as the English governor was absent, and gave an account of the danger in which the part of the colony he had just visited was, begging that Government would supply him with a steamer, in which to send the stores which he hoped to procure. His request was willingly granted, and the Bishop returned to find his messenger had been no less successful in his begging expedition; a list was made of the most necessary articles to send out, and Mr. B. was desired to buy them, and have them in readiness for instant dispatch.

The following day the Bishop sat in his study, when an aide-de-camp was announced from the governor, and was shown into the room. He had come to say that Government, having considered the point, had come to the conclusion it was its duty to supply stores as well as to charter the vessel, and

therefore begged that the Bishop would take no further steps in the matter.

The Bishop was delighted at the liberality of the Government, and having found, upon inquiry, that everything needful was being sent, he requested Mr. B. to return the money to all those who had subscribed it, and departed that same afternoon for his visitation in the *Megantic*, with a mind relieved from fears for his poor flock in Labrador.

He was absent for several weeks; on his return the first thing he learnt on inquiry about the Labrador supplies was, that they had been sent, indeed, but that Government, unwilling to go to the expense of chartering a steamer, and learning that the owner of a small vessel was returning to his home (about a hundred miles distant from the mission station) for the winter, had engaged him to deliver the stores. The Bishop's

heart sank ; he felt but too certain that the captain would run no risk to keep his bargain, the temptations of going home might prove too strong for him ; if he had adverse winds and a long passage, the winter would be setting in by the time he neared his home, and the fear that if he proceeded further he might be weather-bound, and separated from his relations for eight or nine months, would lead him to delay delivering his cargo till the spring brought some assurance of a safe passage.

Already the ice was coming down, and giant bergs were guarding the straits of Belleisle ; it was too late to send even a steamer now, gladly as the noble-hearted Bishop would have done it. All that he could do was to pray for his flock, to trust that the heavenly Father who feeds the young ravens that call upon Him would not suffer these

poor creatures to perish of starvation, which, without His aid, seemed inevitable.

So the winter passed away, and the snow melted, and the warm spring days changed into the intense heat of the Canadian summer.

It was time for the Synod. All the clergy and lay delegates in the diocese of Quebec assembled in the city of Quebec to discuss the affairs of the church, and decide what to do to strengthen its foundations. All the earnest church people were ready with the offers of hospitality for those who came up on the business of the church, so that they might be put to as little expense as possible, the Bishop being foremost in receiving as many as his small house would hold.

He looked forward with great anxiety to the Synod, for at it Mr. W. was to be present; as he was coming to Quebec for his



ordination, and knowing how eagerly his heart was set upon it, the Bishop felt sure that nothing but stern necessity would prevent his attending; but two days of the Synod had already gone by, the ordination Sunday was drawing near, yet still the Labrador missionary had not arrived.

The Bishop found it difficult to attend to business whilst over him hung the doubt whether the flock in Labrador might not have perished during the past winter: his first thought in the morning was, would Mr. W. arrive? his room was ready for him when he should do so. His first question on returning from the Synod was, had anything been heard of him?

In the meantime how had matters gone on in Labrador?

As weeks passed without any change in the wind, the hopes of the colonists died;

the nights, too, became sharp and cold, and the few trees which were not evergreen grew yellow, and crimson, and tawny, evident signs that winter was creeping on, and the chances of relief becoming less.

Again Mr. W. urged steps should be taken at once to make a common stock of all the provisions in the settlement—to measure them, calculate exactly how long they would last, and serve them out so as to afford as much nourishment as possible till the summer returned. His motto was plainly that God helps those who help themselves: whilst not doubting that God was able to save them in the peril which overhung them, he felt that if they did not use all the means in their power it would be tempting Him.

His flock were accustomed to trust to him, and soon agreed to follow his advice, though

there were many among them who still felt sure the provisions would arrive in time, and fancied this care rather needless.

But events proved how Mr. W.'s carefulness had been directed by Providence. The days grew shorter and colder, and the nights longer; the lack of sunshine was made up for by the glorious Northern lights, flaring up like showers of molten gold; then dense fogs and mists rose up from the surface of the St. Lawrence; the long comatiques were repaired and got ready for winter use, for the ice was forming, and all communication with inhabited parts of the world was entirely shut off.

It seemed almost a desperate hope of life: the food had to be measured out by ounces, so that each might have a small quantity; and they had to trust that they might shoot some moose, or catch some fish through the

ice-holes. How the huge, fierce dogs, so needful in these icy regions for drawing the comatiques, fared it is difficult to say, for at all times they seem half-starved, and this winter they must have fared worse than ever, and have been more ferocious. It was an unusually long, hard winter; the ice remained later than it generally does, but still the provisions lasted out, though every day they diminished.

Mr. W. became very anxious. Unless the vessel soon arrived he could not get to Quebec in time to be ordained, which would be a great grief to him; but more than this, there was but enough bread left for one day, and although navigation was open there were no signs of a sail approaching the mission station. Well might they pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," for the last loaf was consumed, yet no help came.

There seemed no chance for all the lives to be saved ; some were sure to sink from the effects of starvation before succour came.

But man's extremity is God's opportunity. Just as the hearts of all almost sank in despair a sail was sighted. It was the vessel which had been sent off the previous autumn from Quebec ; the captain, fearing when he got near his home that the open weather would not last long enough for him to go to the mission station and back, and—we will hope—not knowing the dangers which the people would run through his neglect of duty, made up his mind that so long as he delivered his stores it did not matter whether he delivered them at once, and that it would do to carry them on as early as possible in the spring.

What would have been his feelings if he had found that his culpable neglect had

caused the death of his fellow-creatures ! Would he have recognised the fact ? It is hard to say, for we are all too apt to excuse ourselves, and if things go wrong, and souls or bodies are lost by our neglect of duty, to persuade ourselves that, after all, it might have been so in any case, that we could not foresee the danger : so we shut our eyes to our faults and failings.

But God had rescued his faithful flock. Although greatly reduced by want, not one actually was killed by famine, nor did Mr. W. lose his chance of ordination. He was able to leave his people with an easy heart now that their bodily wants were supplied, whilst he went to obtain the power of ministering to their spiritual needs.

He arrived in Quebec the third day of the Synod, bearing in his face and person the signs of the sufferings which, like a true

shepherd, he had shared with his flock, but full of happiness at the prospect of the grace about to be conferred upon him, and of gratitude for the mercies lately bestowed upon him.

Such is a true account of one of the dangers escaped by the Labrador fishermen, but year by year their privations are almost as bad; we read of women clad, in their bitter winter weather, in but one garment, and of other privations which are fully shared by the devoted men who watch over these portions of the Lord's fold.

This summer the Bishop is again going, in all human probability, to Labrador; are there none who can send out some help to this portion of the Church of Christ?

Even if we cannot give our money, we must give our prayers, not only for these destitute people, that their bodily wants may

be supplied, but also for those set over them, that God will strengthen their hands, and bless their work, sending forth more labourers into His vineyard. Here are two prayers which it would be well if we all used, and more particularly those amongst us who have friends in the colonies :—

“O God, show Thy mercy upon our brethren who are perishing for lack of opportunities of grace. Pardon them if they have needlessly forsaken the privileges of Thy Church, through desire of gain ; and grant that faithful priests ministering in their portion of Thy vineyard may train the young, instruct the ignorant, tend the sick, win the hardened, bring back the penitent, and perfect Thy saints to the glory of Thy holy Name ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

“Grant, we beseech Thee, O Lord, that those



who are separated from visible communion with their brethren, remembering the invisible fellowship of Thy saints who worship together with them round the Altar of the great High Priest, and keeping themselves as befit Thy holy Sanctuary, may be enlightened to contemplate Thy perfect glory : the source of purity and strength to all Thy worshippers, the hope of our pilgrimage, and the joy of our everlasting Home ; so that, being consoled of Thee, they may be enabled to console others in all their troubles, and may bring them to take part in the general assembly of Thy ransomed ones ; through the merits and mediation of Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

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